

# Chronic Absenteeism



**AZ READY GRADUATION TASK FORCE**  
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# Chronic Absenteeism Defined



- Chronic absenteeism is not the same as truancy or average daily attendance – the attendance rate schools use for state report cards and federal accountability. Chronic absenteeism means missing 10 percent of a school year for any reason.
- A school can have average daily attendance of 90 percent and still have 40 percent of its students chronically absent, because on different days, different students make up that 90 percent.
- A recent study shows the following generalizations about the link between average daily attendance and chronic absenteeism:
  - Greater than 97% of avg daily attendance = significant challenges not prevalent with chronic absenteeism, but data should still be analyzed to identify trends and strategies
  - 95 – 97% avg daily attendance = likely that chronic absenteeism patterns exist, data must be analyzed to identify trends and strategies
  - Less than 95% avg daily attendance = chronic absenteeism is an issue, data must be analyzed to identify trends and strategies

# Chronic Absenteeism – Research Shows



- Attendance and achievement are inextricably linked, as such, increasing attendance becomes an essential tool for improving achievement.
- Researchers have repeatedly identified chronic absences as a signal that students are headed off track academically. Chronic absenteeism increases achievement gaps at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
  - In a nationally representative data set, chronic absence in kindergarten was associated with lower academic performance in first grade. The impact is twice as great for students from low-income families.
  - A Baltimore study found a strong relationship between sixth-grade attendance and the percentage of students graduating on time or within a year of their expected high school graduation.
- The association between attendance and performance is found across socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds
  - Important note: Black and Hispanic students, the groups with the highest poverty rates, are more likely than White and Asian students to be chronically absent.
  - Students from low-income families had lower attendance than their more affluent peers.
  - Because students reared in poverty benefit the most from being in school, one of the most effective strategies for providing pathways out of poverty is to do what it takes to get these students in school every day. This alone, even without improvements in the American education system, will drive up achievement, high school graduation, and college attainment rates.
- Reducing chronic absence is essential to turning around under-performing schools.
- The negative impact of absences on literacy is 75% larger for low-income children whose families often lack resources to make up lost time on task. (Ready 2010)

# Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism



- Students who cannot attend school due to illness, family responsibilities, housing instability, the need to work or involvement with the juvenile justice system.
- Students who will not attend school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment.
- Students who do not attend school because they, or their parents, do not see the value in being there, they have something else they would rather do, or nothing stops them from skipping school.

# Effective Practices To Address Chronic Absenteeism



- **What effective efforts have in common**
  - close, often weekly, measurement and tracking of absenteeism,
  - development of a diagnostic capacity to understand why students are missing school,
  - a problem-solving capacity to help address those reasons,
  - building and sustaining relationships with the students who are experiencing absenteeism, and often their families,
  - the development of a multi-sector and community response that often involves a second shift of adults in the schools with the highest levels of chronic absenteeism to meet the scale of the challenge,
  - efforts to recognize and reward good attendance, and
  - a commitment to learn what works, and then to replicate and expand effective programs to modify what is not working.

# Considerations for Addressing Chronic Absenteeism



- Most current responses to habitual absenteeism (incl, tardiness) are punitive and only occur after chronic absenteeism thresholds have been reached
- States are beginning to recognize that early identification and intervention is key
- Districts and schools must monitor for chronic absenteeism in order to identify students early in this trend and implement strategies that decrease chronic absenteeism (important to include sporadic as well as consecutive absenteeism)
- A common definition is helpful in ensuring statewide impact (consider daily as well as period absence)
- Elementary-aged absences are normally treated differently than middle- or high school-level absences.
- Building awareness is a core component to addressing chronic absenteeism

# Recommended Next Steps



- Research on emerging state policies to address chronic absenteeism
- Data analysis on chronic absenteeism in Arizona
- Research on Arizona district policies and practices to address tardiness, attendance and truancy
- Connect with Statewide Literacy Director to align strategies and next steps

# Resources



- The Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Taking Attendance Seriously, How School Absences Undermine Student and School Performance in New York City
- Everyone Graduates Center, The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public